

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MARCH 2023

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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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The Value of Distinguished Clubs

Will your club be Distinguished this year? Some of you already know the answer is yes. Your club has added new members, existing members have achieved their educational goals, officers went to training, and club business was handled in an effective and efficient way. That's what being Distinguished is all about.

Some of you are a little more hesitant because you know that there's still work to do. There are still members to add; there are more Pathways projects to be completed.

When I first joined Toastmasters nearly 20 years ago, I did not understand why being a Distinguished club mattered. In my mind, being Distinguished just meant checking off a certain number of requirements established in Toastmasters' Distinguished Club Program (DCP). It certainly had nothing to do with whether I was in a good club, and nothing to do with my experience as a Toastmaster or the experience of those in my club.

What I've come to understand is that my thinking was very shortsighted. Behind every number on the DCP report there is a story, a story of a member whose life has been changed by Toastmasters, whose life has improved because they achieved a goal. Club leaders went to Club Officer Training and learned something that helped them not only be better officers but also to be more effective in their careers.

The Distinguished Club Program is the best measure we have of how effective a club is at meeting its mission.

Those officers know they're the ones who got new members registered or who recruited prospective members to the club. They articulated club values and inspired members to expand their skills. Such accomplishments build self-confidence, which is the outcome we want from the Toastmasters experience.

The Distinguished Club Program is the best measure we have of how effective a club is at meeting its mission. It tells us that members are achieving goals. It tells us that new members are joining, bringing a greater diversity of feedback. It tells us that members are dedicated to improving themselves and that officers are committed to getting the training they need so the members of their club can get the most out of their Toastmasters experience.

In August 2022, the Board of Directors announced some changes to the DCP that more accurately reflect the challenges we've had coming out of the pandemic. If you're not familiar with those, check with your Area Director, check with one of your other District leaders, check your club's [dashboard](#) on the Toastmasters website—but be familiar with the program. My goal is to be able to recognize your club in July for being a Distinguished club, because it truly does matter.

Matt Kinsey, DTM
International President

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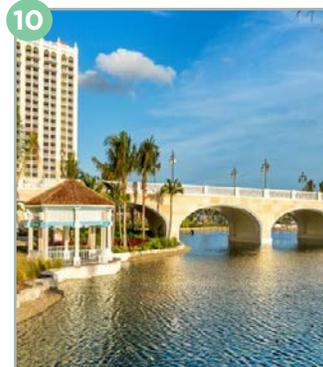
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News

Language Resources Are Growing!

Newly elected club officers can learn about their roles with the [Club Leadership Handbook](#)—currently available in Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tamil.

Members can also access several club-focused materials and Pathways projects in various languages. Hungarian translations of all Pathways Level 1 and Level 2 projects are in Base Camp. Two accompanying guides and [a chart](#) (in English and Hungarian) are free to download from the [Resource Library](#).

Additional items are available (click on your language) as free downloads from the Resource Library:

- **Swedish:** Youth Leadership Program Workbook
- **Greek:** Features, Benefits, and Value Chart
- **Korean:** Pathways Projects Available in Korean
- **Malayalam:** Find Your Voice, Your Path to Leadership, The Benefits of Toastmasters Membership
- **Spanish (Mexico):** Develop Your Leaders From Within, Corporate Club Soft Skills Flier, Member Interest Survey, Transform Your Talent
- **Simplified Chinese:** New Club Mentoring Matters
- **Speech Contest Certificates in 11 languages:** Recognize your participants and winners at the club level and beyond.

Contact translations@toastmasters.org for questions or assistance.

Connect With Prospects

A recent survey to prospective members who filled out the Find a Club form found that 67% had not visited a club because they never heard back after reaching out. To help you better

connect with prospects, first make sure your contact information is up to date in Club Central. Need more assistance? [This guide](#) has five steps to help you grow your club today.

Resources

Fun for Your Family or Club

Are you looking for some innovative ways to get your kids talking at the dinner table or your fellow members to participate in Table Topics®? The [Toastmasters Online Store](#) has games available to help you, your family, and friends think on your feet while trying to avoid those pesky filler words. Bring home [And I'm Like](#) or try out [Chat Pack](#) for business meetings, gatherings, travel, and more.

Tune In: The Magic of Metaphors!

When used effectively, metaphors are magic spells of communication that cement the connection between you and your audience while doubling as powerful tools of persuasion. In this [Toastmasters Podcast episode](#), speaker and author Oscar Santolalla, DTM, will enlighten you on how to use metaphors in your presentation. Want to soak up more metaphor tips like a sponge? Read his [article](#) on this topic.

Use Updated Resources

To ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of resources, utilize the [Resource Library](#) to download the files you need. Find the latest version of items like the [Membership Application](#), which will help your club add new members.

Reminders

Save the Date

March 21 is World Poetry Day! In the spirit of the occasion, people are encouraged to read and savor the work of poets around the world. The event was started in 1999 by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Channel your inner poet with these tips from a [Toastmaster article](#) on the power of poetry.

Renew Your Dues

To ensure your club is in good standing, submit your payments by April 1, 2023. Per Policy 2.0, the minimum renewal requirement is eight paid members—at least three of whom were club members during the previous renewal period. Email renewals@toastmasters.org for questions.



Toastmasters News

In Memory of Ian B. Edwards

Past International President is remembered for his zest for learning and leadership.

By Stephanie Darling

Ian B. Edwards, DTM, Toastmasters International President in 1995–96, passed away after a year-and-a-half battle with cancer on November 5, 2022, at his home near Perth, Western Australia.

Edwards' colleagues will remember his zest for learning, astute leadership, and deep admiration for the organization and its members. He often said, "When you go to a club meeting, you go to the most important room in the world—the room for improvement."

Edwards brought a wealth of diverse talent to Toastmasters, including the international insight he absorbed while living in numerous countries. Not surprisingly, he became "a tireless advocate for the global expansion of Toastmasters beyond the English-speaking world," says Tim Keck, DTM, International President, 1999–2000.

Edwards was born in Cape Town, South Africa, grew up in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), and received undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of London. He earned a Ph.D. from North Dakota State University in Fargo, in the United States, and went on to a 55-year career as a world-renowned expert in genetics and plant breeding.

"He enjoyed a global reputation for achievement over a long career," Keck says. And yet, "Ian was as comfortable at dinner with a Nobel Prize winner as he was with his friends at a Toastmasters convention," adds Eddie Dunn, DTM, International President, 1983–84.

Edwards joined Gate City Club in Fargo, in 1977 to sharpen his skills in effectively presenting his research around the world. He stayed to grow as a leader. Edwards was highly successful on both counts, Dunn says.

As Dunn tells it, "I met Ian when he was a Club President; the club soared under his leadership. So, [he] was the first person I sought to be an Area Governor when I was elected District Governor. He stood out as an individual—I



Ian B. Edwards, DTM

was impressed with his unwavering commitment to excellence and to integrity. It was easy to see he could contribute greatly to the success of our organization. And he did!"

A. Edward Bick, DTM, 1990–91 International President, echoed Keck and Dunn in admiration for Edwards' unfailing integrity and vision as a leader.

"I always admired Ian for his honesty and integrity, and ability to clearly define his position," says Bick. "Although we occasionally disagreed on a specific topic or action, we were always clear on what was required, and Ian was front and center to 'help carry the water.'"

Edwards held roles at the Area, District, and international levels. As a Board member, he was an enthusiastic chair of the Education Committee. In 1994, he was chair of the Policy Administrative Review Committee (PAR) when Toastmasters confronted a serious internal challenge to the organization's integrity. Eventually, the conflict resulted in a club being

expelled. "It wasn't a pleasant thing to do. But the leadership team did the right thing for Toastmasters International," Edwards told Tim Keck in a 2014 interview at the International Convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

As International President, Edwards visited Toastmasters all around the world; he was especially heralded in District 74, South Africa, his birthplace. In addition to the Fargo club, he belonged to two clubs that now meet online: Los Orados Toastmasters, a bilingual club, and Professional Achievers Toastmasters. During his term, Toastmasters welcomed 620 new clubs.

In the Keck interview, Edwards said he was proud to be a Toastmaster because, "We change people's lives. We build leaders." These ideals—learning, communication, and especially leadership—signify Edwards' legacy, Keck, Dunn, and Bick agree.

"Ian believed strongly Toastmasters should include leadership skills in its mission statement, along with communication skills," Dunn says.

"Discussions on [emphasizing leadership] were taking place but not fast enough for Ian. So, during his farewell speech as International President, he simply claimed that Toastmasters' mission was to assist members in developing their communication and leadership skills."

Dunn continued, "I recall a Board member approaching Ian shortly after to remind him that leadership wasn't in the mission statement. Ian's only response: a mischievous grin." Some years later, leadership was added to the mission statement.

Edwards is survived by his wife, Barbara; daughter, Julie; stepsons Andrew and Nick, and five grandchildren.

Stephanie Darling is senior editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.

Traveling Toastmaster



DOROTHY CHANAKIRA, DTM, of Harare, Zimbabwe, pauses to take a picture in Mauritius.



STEVEN GEORGE (left) and **ADARSH METGAL, DTM**, both of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, watch the India versus Pakistan cricket match in Dubai. The match was part of the 2022 Asia Cup and attended by nearly 24,000 people.

Heard Around the World

Members Give Reasons to Renew

At the Toastmasters 2022 International Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, members were asked what they thought prospective members should know about the organization, and why they continue to renew their membership year after year. Below are a few of their inspiring responses as we move toward membership renewal time. You can hear more members' feedback on [Toastmasters International's YouTube channel](#).

"The way the organization presents itself offers us an opportunity as individuals to evolve. There are constantly new things that you can do each year. Even though you are the same Toastmaster, and you might be in the same club, you are going to give speech after speech after speech. You evolve in every role that you play and in every speech that you give. You're given an opportunity to do it just that much better."

Anita J. Ramprasad, DTM

"[New members] don't see their own growth. As a fellow Toastmaster, a fellow club member, the best service we could do, and increase retention, is to point out other people's breakthroughs—other people's growth—and I think if they see that, they'll stick around."

**Darren LaCroix, AS,
2001 World Champion of
Public Speaking**

"This is one of the biggest communities—biggest meaning biggest in our lives. It always has been for me. That's honestly the biggest reason why I renew."

**Mike Carr,
2020 World Champion
of Public Speaking**

"Toastmasters has allowed me to look deep within, understand what I bring to the table, and how I can realize and empower and amplify my own voice to help myself and everyone that is around me."

Sravanthi Vallampati, DTM

"Toastmasters is not a restaurant for you to sit back and say, 'Serve me.' What it is is a big, beautiful, bountiful buffet that I tell people, 'Please, take your tray, go down that buffet, and you be greedy. Be greedy and take everything that possibly can help you grow, become better, challenge yourself. I think the moment that we allow ourselves to become complacent, that's the end.'"

Beth Ramsay, DTM

Spreading Communication Skills

Club members find mutual benefits with prison workshop participants.

By Karen Chapman

In April 2022, I undertook my proudest achievement: I conducted a communication workshop in a prison and provided residents with the opportunity to develop a skill that had positively transformed my own life.

Years ago, I had a lifelong fear of public speaking that was starting to hold me back both professionally and socially. I decided to take a stand and tackle this issue head-on instead of avoiding situations that required me to speak in a formal setting or to more than one person at a time. I joined Toastmasters in 2014, and it was the best decision I ever made.

My newfound confidence and improved career success felt so amazing that I wanted to help others grow as well. My goal was to help people upskill, while enhancing their self-esteem at the same time. I decided a prison workshop would be a great place to start helping others.

After making some contacts in the judiciary systems, planning the workshop, and gathering a small team of Toastmasters, six of us ran a communication program at Springhill, an open (minimum security) men's prison in Edgcott, England. Our aim was to build the confidence and communication skills of residents in the space of an afternoon, and to equip them with the tools to continue to develop these skills after the event.

We introduced the 16 participants to public speaking as a skill to use in daily life. We emphasized that it doesn't just mean talking to hundreds of people at a conference, but also has practical uses in interviews, daily interactions, and social occasions.

Our Toastmasters team shared our speaking challenges and successes. We emphasized the fact that most people aren't comfortable with public speaking, but those barriers can be overcome when individuals are given a safe platform to practice. Mistakes are considered opportunities to improve.



Karen Chapman, pictured center in gray shirt, and fellow Toastmasters workshop organizers.

We detailed speaking tips and the foundations of a good speech. Participants went through a short warm-up exercise, then spoke for 10 seconds about their favorite color. The warm-up was key, as it broke the ice and participants felt a sense of accomplishment for taking that first step.

We split into small groups and residents shared their own communication challenges

before preparing, practicing, and giving a one- to three-minute speech to the group. Although nervous at the beginning, the men started to open up in the breakout sessions which acted as support groups in terms of what was holding them back with communication. The more each person shared, the more it encouraged others to open up.

We advised the group on how to make speeches more effective. Participants were encouraged to give feedback on each other's speeches as well, to help hone listening skills. After the group work, many participants presented their speeches to all the attendees.

By then, the energy was high and there was an air of camaraderie in the room. We presented each participant with a certificate of achievement, and we got to witness the men showing off the certificates to prison officers.

The residents then shared with us how much they enjoyed the afternoon. They realized the benefits of the training and wanted more!

We also gained a great deal from the day—learning about the lives of the residents, developing our leadership skills, completing projects in Pathways, and having the warm, fuzzy feeling that comes from helping others. We

returned for a second workshop, this time with some Toastmasters who lived closer to the prison. I was ecstatic that it was such a success and am currently planning to run a similar workshop for those experiencing homelessness.

Workshops like this have a huge mutual benefit for participants and organizers. I encourage all Toastmasters to share what you

My newfound confidence and improved career success felt so amazing that I wanted to help others grow as well.

have learned with others and reach out to those who may benefit from a similar workshop. It's especially helpful for those who may not be able to attend our regular Toastmasters meetings due to life's challenges.

Karen Chapman is a member of *Beckenham Communicators of Beckenham, England*.

Accept the Challenge

Broaden your view of what is possible within Toastmasters.

By Bill Brown, DTM

It is easy to look at the Toastmasters education program and only see the Pathways speeches. Some members thrive in that learning environment; others may be looking for a broader path. If you are someone who needs a different challenge, let me suggest some ideas for your consideration. Perhaps you need to broaden your view of what is possible within the organization. Perhaps you need to dream big and see where it may lead.

First, I suggest that you take inventory of your Toastmasters goals. For many it is to “become a better speaker,” “become a better leader,” or “become a Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM).” But, like others, your goals might fall in a different direction. When I moved from Las Vegas to Wyoming, one key goal of mine was just to meet people, to plug into my new community. That is a benefit of Toastmasters that may not be “part of the program,” but it is certainly a benefit that is there. And one that worked well for me. My Toastmasters involvement has led me in a number of directions within my community. I now have connections within the county and state legislature, the University of Wyoming, and other contacts around the state, but it all started with Toastmasters. There are reasons to be a Toastmaster that go beyond achieving a Level 3 in Pathways.

In a larger sense, I view Toastmasters as a petri dish for experimentation. I first joined to test out various speaking topics. I soon realized that I had a lot to learn about speaking itself, which became my focus for many years. But in the process, I found my initial topic in speech delivery, with a strong focus on advanced vocal variety. I have used the 5- to 7-minute speeches to test out various components of that message. But I have now reached the point where I need longer sessions to fully hone my program.

My articles here in the *Toastmaster* magazine have resulted in invitations to speak to clubs around the world in longer segments. I have had opportunities to speak outside of Toastmasters as well, but it all started with my willingness to accept the challenges to grow that Toastmasters had presented to me. What if I had said no to that first article?

The key is that, while I worked within the Pathways learning experience, my goals went



While making progress
in my path, I made
Pathways work for me with
my own unique goals.

beyond it. I used Toastmasters to experiment and to test out various ideas. While making progress in my path, I made Pathways work for me with my own unique goals. You may have some unique goals, too. Use Toastmasters to test them out. You never know where they may lead.

My primary focus is on the communications aspects of Toastmasters. I must confess that the leadership track has never really interested

me. In fact, after more than 16 years as a leader in the organization, I am finally enjoying being a club leader. What made the difference? In my previous clubs, I was performing a task. Now, I am providing guidance and experience. I am, in effect, the club's mentor. I have found my leadership niche. Perhaps you can find yours, as well.

My interest is at the club level, but there are others who thrive at higher levels. I am glad that there are members who love serving in District leadership. While that may not be my cup of tea, you might find that is exactly where you belong if you are looking for a new challenge within Toastmasters.

The center of the Toastmasters education program is Pathways, and it is easy to focus on that alone. But the opportunities within Toastmasters go far beyond that. Be open to discovering new skills, new interests, new dreams. I didn't know that I could write until I was asked to submit an article to the *Toastmaster* magazine. I didn't know that my voice-over experience would enable me to help speakers until I started doing speech evaluations. What opportunities do you have within Toastmasters to build on your unique skills? Go for it and see where it leads.

If you are achieving your goals by giving speeches within your club, great! But if you are looking for something more, take a look around at what you see within the organization. Dare to dream. Dare to experiment. Dare to look for new challenges. You may be amazed at what you discover.

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette, and Evening Stars Club in Denver, Colorado. Learn more at www.billbrownspeechcoach.com.



See the Sights in Nassau!

The host city of the 2023 Toastmasters International Convention boasts a vibrant mix of beaches, buildings, and culture.

By Paul Sterman

Come for the speeches, stay for the beaches.

The Toastmasters 2023 International Convention is being held this August in one of the most alluring cities in the world: Nassau, capital of The Bahamas. The event will be hybrid—both online and onsite—but by attending the four-day event in person, at the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar resort, you'll have the opportunity to explore, relax, and eat surrounded by tropical beauty.

Chief among the highlights: the gleaming white sand beaches that The Bahamas is famous for. The kind with warm, crystal-clear, turquoise-blue waters. Pamela D. Rolle, DTM, a Nassau resident and the co-chair for Convention Host District 47, says there's nothing quite like visiting the beaches here. "It's refreshing, relaxing, calming, and rejuvenating," says the Past District Governor.

The Bahamas is an archipelago of nearly 700 islands and cays. Nassau is located on the island of New Providence, and connected by bridge to Paradise Island, a three-mile resort destination located to the north.

This combined area is often regarded as the gateway to The Bahamas. Replete with a tropical climate, spectacular scenery, lush vegetation, and a vivid cultural scene, it's a top draw for cruise lines and visitors from around the world.

Tourism expert Charles Adderley has talked with many happy vacationers in Nassau and Paradise Island over the years. "The first thing people talk about is the weather, our natural resources in terms of beaches, the friendliness of the people, the food, the culture—and there's so much to do," says Adderley, an executive director for Cacique International, a destination management company in Nassau that provides tours and excursions.

A Little History

Once a British colony, The Bahamas is now an independent Commonwealth country. It became free and independent of British rule in 1973. Toastmasters has a starring role in the island nation, with both Prime Minister Philip Davis, DTM, and Deputy Prime Minister Chester Cooper, DTM, being [longtime members](#). The first Toastmasters club in The Bahamas chartered in Nassau in 1969, and there are now more than 40 clubs throughout this country of approximately 400,000 people.

District 47—the Toastmasters home of current International President Matt Kinsey, DTM—encompasses South Florida and The Bahamas.



At left, Government House in Nassau, marked by its distinct architecture; at right, a view of the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar resort.



The Downtown Area

Downtown Nassau and the surrounding area reveal a mix of the island's history and colorful present. The architecture reflects centuries of European influence. Among the area's highlights are the Heritage Museum of The Bahamas; three historic forts that protected the Nassau harbor in colonial times and the era of pirates; and [Government House](#)—the official residence of the country's Governor-General. The striking pink and white building accentuates a mix of Bahamian British and American Colonial architecture.

Longtime Toastmaster Denison Balfour, DTM, an assistant manager at The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, Investments and Aviation, in Nassau, recommends a variety of fun places to visit in the downtown area. They include the National Art Gallery and Museum; Ardastra Gardens, which has flamingos, parrots, Bahamian boa constrictors, and many other colorful creatures; and the Nassau Straw Market, a bustling place featuring hundreds of vendors and thousands of items to choose from, ranging from Bahamian crafts and hand-woven straw hats to conch shell jewelry, wood carvings, souvenirs, local delicacies, and more. For those who like to shop, there are also boutique shops that showcase the rich colors of Bahamian fashion.



adise Island. Among the most dazzling: Cable Beach, a two-and-a-half-mile stretch where the Baha Mar resort sits. Its postcard beauty and tranquil waters soothe the mind and body. The ocean in The Bahamas is also filled with coral, tropical fish, and exotic marine life like seahorses and angelfish.

Depending on how much time you have, you can indulge in a range of water activities on the islands, including boat excursions, diving, snorkeling, kayaking, speedboat rides, and deep-sea fishing. Tourist offerings include ocean encounters with pigs, dolphins, sea lions, and wild turtles.

The Food

Savory seafood dishes abound in The Bahamas. Lobster, crawfish, crab, shellfish, to name just a few. "We have fried fish, boiled fish, steamed fish—all different kinds of ways of making fish," notes Adderley.

The biggest draw is conch (pronounced "konk"), a culinary staple in The Bahamas. The meat of this large mollusk is prepared in every way imaginable; you'll find conch salad, conch chowder, cracked conch, conch fritters, and more conch concoctions.

The dining scene in Nassau and Paradise Island is a diverse one, with plenty of spots serving native Bahamian fare (peas and rice dishes are a specialty, as are tropical drinks of all varieties) and many internationally flavored restaurants as well. [The Nassau Fish Fry](#) is a glut

of fish eateries located along one long strip, from sit-down restaurants to beach shacks.

The Baha Mar resort alone features a wide range of prominent restaurants, including the Sugar Factory, Cleo Mediterraneo, the Palms, and Katsuya.

Your Convention Location

Glitzy luxury resorts dot Nassau and Paradise Island, with the Baha Mar leading the way. It is located 10 minutes from the Nassau International Airport and is spread across 1,000 acres.

The resort boasts a dazzling array of amenities, including a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, a casino, tennis courts, retail shops, multiple swimming pools, a beach sanctuary (with daily animal feedings), and unlimited access to a giant water park next door.

There are many excellent reasons to attend this year's Toastmasters convention in person, and the chance to visit Nassau is one more. When you aren't viewing education sessions, watching speech contests, or visiting with Toastmasters friends from around the world, you can take advantage of the exquisite area around you.

"Nassau, Bahamas, is a special place to hold a Toastmasters convention," says Rolle, "because of our unique, colorful history and culture."

Paul Serman is senior editor, executive & editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.

The [Toastmasters 2023 International Convention](#) will be held August 16-19, with the in-person option at the [Grand Hyatt Baha Mar](#) resort in Nassau, Bahamas. **More information in the coming months!** Visit www.bahamas.com to learn more about Nassau and The Bahamas.



Open Houses Open Doors to New Members

Give guests a chance to engage with your club in action.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

Successful clubs have a blend of both experienced and new members. If your club needs a boost of fresh folks, one of the most popular ways to do that is to hold an open house—a Toastmasters meeting where prospective members are invited to attend. While all Toastmasters meetings are open to visitors, the open house emphasizes the benefits of Toastmasters to prospective members, and may include food or a special program.

The goal is to attract a large number of guests, with a portion of them joining as members. What are the key elements to having a successful open house? Several Toastmasters shared their insights.

Plan

Rose Kirland, DTM, a member of 10 clubs, including Hawaii Speakers Bureau in Honolulu, Hawaii, has hosted several open houses. An open house is a larger event than a standard meeting, so Kirland recommends assembling a team to ensure the event runs smoothly. Team members

can work on a variety of functions, including event promotion, meeting planning, food preparation, and guest relations, according to their interest.

“Planning is essential,” says Kirland. “You and your team should brainstorm answers to what are the goals of the event. Who is the target audience and what are the roles of the team members? Of course, you also need to decide the time and venue.”

That said, be sure not to get too caught up in the planning stage. “Others have successfully run open houses before you, so reproduce what works best and learn from the mistakes of others,” says Florian Bay, DTM, of the London Victorians in the United Kingdom. Contact leaders in your club, Area, or District who have hosted an open house and get their best advice.

Bob Hooley, DTM, AS, of the Wild Rose Club in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, emphasizes that the meeting itself should be well planned. “It needs to be well run, tight,” he says. Prospective members are more impressed

with a well-run meeting.” Timing is important both in person and online. Be sure to create an agenda and stick to it!

Finally, don’t forget the need for communication and coordination within the team. “I scheduled biweekly meetings on a group channel on Slack,” says Yi Zhang, a former member of Virtual Speak Toastmasters Club in Palo Alto, California. “We talked about opportunities, concerns. Direct communication builds trust, and it made our communication smoother.”

Zhang also says a theme for the open house can draw in visitors. Themes may revolve around an upcoming holiday or sporting event, a television show, or favorite hobbies. A theme

meeting on its internal employee communication channels.

Your best bet, however, is word of mouth. “Ask members to personally invite people to come,” says Hooley. “It makes a huge impact by having a personal touch.” It’s an even more effective method if members offer to bring the guest or meet them at the door.

Select Speakers

Finally, you’ll want to consider your speakers. Some clubs have one or two members speak (perhaps an experienced and a newer member), but a special guest speaker is also an option.

Zhang opted for a guest speaker and reached out to his District Director for

It’s also helpful to encourage members to make small talk before and after the meeting, as well as during any breaks, so guests stay engaged. “We noticed that [guests] were often shy to speak up, so interacting with the group was important,” says Zhang. “It was a new environment, but people became more confident once they started to interact with the group,” he says.

When it comes to a hybrid open house, be sure to have your technology set up so that online attendees feel they are getting the full experience, just as an in-person guest would. Camera and microphone setups play a big role in this. Ensure in-person speakers can be seen and heard clearly by all participants.

The benefit for online attendees is a bit more personalization. Encourage them to pick a virtual background that matches the theme of the event or provide one to be downloaded. It’s helpful to have a club member attend online so they can help online guests feel engaged and included.

“If you want to have 50 people in the room, do enough marketing to attract 100 people.”

—FLORIAN BAY, DTM

gives the added benefit of a relatable way to market the event, garner excitement, and add pizzazz to the open house itself.

Promote

If you don’t adequately promote your event, potential guests won’t know to attend. “There are 101-plus ways to tell the world—fliers, press releases, social media, digital marketing, word of mouth,” Kirland says. Toastmasters has some [resources](#) to help, such as a press release template and pre-made fliers that you can use digitally or traditionally.

Bay suggests that clubs aim for quantity of guests. “If you want to have 50 people in the room, do enough marketing to attract 100 people,” he says. “The plan is to attract as many guests as possible and to convert as many as possible into members. Use this as a guiding light throughout.”

Take advantage of social media. Many clubs have Facebook and LinkedIn pages, which can be used to promote meetings and members’ achievements. Encourage club members to share these posts on their personal pages as well or send them directly to friends. Don’t forget about the tried-and-true method of putting up fliers and submitting a notice to the local newspaper. Members of corporate clubs can see if the company will post a notice about the

recommendations. Kirland has done that as well, but she prefers to look within the club first. “We’ve found that it builds camaraderie and strong internal relationships, and helps morale, which adds to why members stay. Open houses give members the opportunity to show their pride,” she says.

Some clubs, such as Hooley’s, have both member and guest speakers. “We make sure our members are there to build rapport with the guests,” he says. “The guest speaker is used to promote the event. Both work very well.”

Of course, whether you have a guest speaker or a club speaker, you’ll want to make the meeting interactive and fun for guests. “Talk to the guests,” Bay says. “Be sure they get a chance to speak during Table Topics. Get them involved right away.”

Online and Hybrid Open Houses

If you’re conducting an open house online, take advantage of the chat box and think of it as a lobby. “We usually ask two or three Zoom monitors to assist about 30 minutes before start time,” she says. “The monitors welcome guests and members.” Before the meeting starts, they have a short break to get water. Once the meeting begins, they put the agenda in the chat box and share a screen about virtual etiquette.

Don’t Forget the Ask

Hooley reminds members that a call to action is needed at the end of the open house just as in the end of a speech. “You need to ask the guests to join,” he says.

Have the application forms printed out and pass them around the room or share the document in the online chat. After a few days, club officers should follow up with guests to see if they’d like to apply for membership. You can include a link to [Member Testimonials](#), a [Club Experience Video](#), and the [Toastmaster magazine](#). Don’t let your hard work go to waste!

While an open house highlights the benefits of Toastmasters for potential new members, it also allows current members to grow new skill sets.

“In addition to becoming more confident in public speaking, I learned soft skills by planning the open house,” says Zhang. “All the feedback I got from my club members is so valuable to me. I have the most amazing club!”

Peggy Beach, DTM, is a freelance writer and communications instructor in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is a Past District 37 Governor. A member of the Hi Rise Toastmasters in Raleigh and the Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, she is available at writereitorpeggybeach@gmail.com.

Club Turnaround Stories



Find out how four clubs went from faltering to flourishing.

By Laura Amann and Stephanie Darling

The past few years have been tough for many clubs. The transition from in-person to online meetings was often bumpy, and once that smoothed over, members complained of Zoom fatigue. However, some clubs that initially saw membership drop dramatically have now found their footing.

If your club needs some inspiration and ideas, read on to discover how four clubs successfully revitalized their membership.

Showcasing Their Club

Lakeland Toastmasters • Lakeland, Florida

For more than 60 years, Lakeland Toastmasters in Lakeland, Florida, had been a strong club, consistently achieving President’s Distinguished status. But after 2020, the club lost momentum. It went from having so many members that leaders were considering splitting into two clubs, to having single digits in attendance. They even lost their venue.

In October 2022, the club held its second community outreach event, called Amplify, which previously had been in an online format. The in-person event worked: By the end of the evening, the club had gained nine new and reinstated members, as well as a freshly energized club base.

“We wanted to do something with the goal of providing value to the community and providing excitement about finding your voice and gaining self-confidence,” says event chair Maria Martinez, DTM, who has served in various club and District leadership positions. “Basically, we

wanted to sell Toastmasters without selling Toastmasters.”

The club has always thrived on interpersonal relationships, something online and hybrid meetings couldn’t always provide. It was the main reason for non-renewals. But current members knew that if they could get people through the door, they could get people excited about Toastmasters.

The Amplify event was something between a demo meeting and an open house, but it was marketed as a community event with a networking component, sponsored by Lakeland Toastmasters. “For some people, ‘open house’ is a term for selling something,” says Martinez. Instead, she wanted the event to showcase how Toastmasters can provide real value by giving people the resources and tools to be the best version of themselves.

“We wanted to tap into people’s desire to get inspired, and say, ‘Look at our people, look at what you’re missing if you’re not a part of it, and here’s how you can be a part of it.’”

The evening started off with an informal hour of networking, allowing people to simply mingle and meet. “Networking is one of the most effective and most underestimated parts of Toastmasters,” Martinez explains.

A seasoned Lakeland member began the program with a speech, and International President Matt Kinsey, DTM (a member of the District), delivered the keynote address. A roundtable discussion followed, with members at various levels of Toastmasters tenure sharing how Toastmasters had impacted their lives.

Nearly 65 people attended, and the club spent little on marketing. The invitation was posted numerous times on the club’s Facebook page, and every club member was asked to attend and share the invite on their social media pages.



Attendees gather at the Amplify outreach event at Lakeland Toastmasters in Lakeland, Florida. Photo credit: Keith Greene from G2 Media

Organizers also posted fliers at local coffee houses and community boards and took advantage of the local chamber of commerce’s calendar of events, as well as a popular local publication’s calendar. Additionally, they crafted personal email messages to send to former members and any recent guests, and they reached out to neighboring clubs.

The event was held at the club’s regular venue so potential new members could see the meeting space. Guests were directed to parking, greeted at a sign-in table, and handed tickets for door prizes. There was also a contest for people who joined that evening.



The registration table at Amplify included door prize tickets and information about Toastmasters. Photo credit: Keith Greene from G2 Media

By the end of the evening, the club had gained nine new and reinstated members and a freshly energized club base.

Knowing that people may change their minds after an event is over, members were very intentional about asking guests to sign up that evening.

“We made sure members understood that nobody should walk out without being asked to join,” says Martinez. “If people fill out the application, now they know they’re a part of our community. It creates a sense of belonging that we all need, and at the same time, that sense of accountability: *I paid, and I want to get my money’s worth.*”

The event served as such a catalyst that the club now welcomes an average of eight guests to each meeting.

“Amplify for us means find your voice, increase your influence,” says Martinez. “Toastmasters has given me so much. Everything I can do to help and support and promote it, I’m there.”

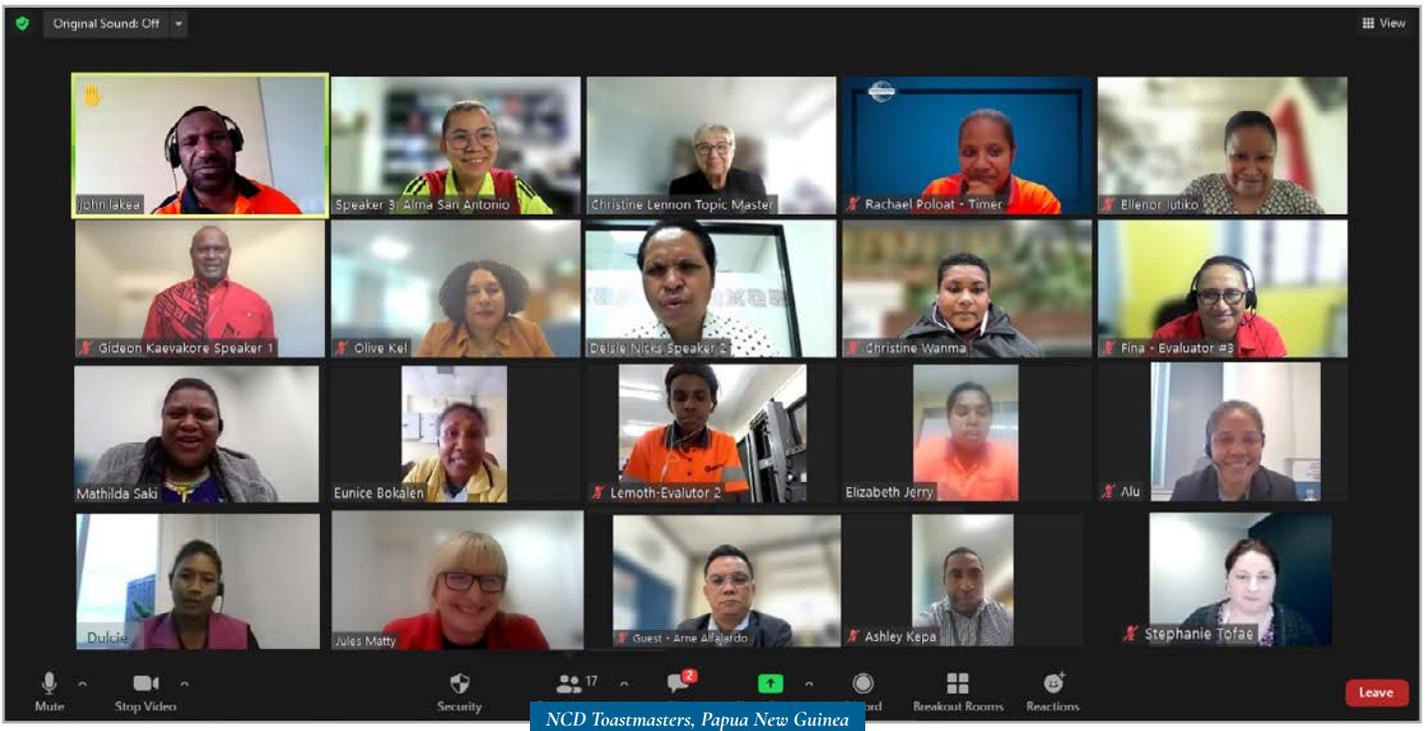
Bringing Clubs Together

NCD Toastmasters • Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

NCD Toastmasters Club chartered in 2017, in Port Moresby, the capital of the island nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Sponsored by the prominent financial services firm Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu PNG, NCD Toastmasters was one of many flourishing Toastmasters clubs in District 69, which also includes Queensland and Northern Territory, in Australia, and Fiji.

The future was bright, says Christine Lennon, DTM, NCD Toastmasters’ Vice President Education, District 69 training coordinator, and a member of three other clubs in New Zealand and Australia.

NCD was an active club so when membership began to dip in 2019, Lennon wasn’t overly concerned. “We saw a slight decline, as often happens in corporate clubs,” she says. However, challenges began to surface. Many Deloitte members worked offsite from the company’s



offices, making conventional noon meetings nearly impossible. After-work meetings proved equally unsuitable. Growth stalled, Lennon says.

When COVID-19 arrived the following year, membership was further disrupted. The economic impact rocked many of the Papua New Guinean companies that had been supporting clubs, including NCD. Corporate budgets were cut; some club members lost their company jobs. But Lennon wasn't about to give up. She contacted two other Port Moresby clubs on the verge of folding and suggested they merge with NCD into a single online club. The merger took place; however, without a corporate sponsor, NCD became self-funded.

“It’s exciting to have a full agenda and to sometimes see 36 people online as visitors. As they step out of their comfort zones, new members are even more excited [about the club].”

—CHRISTINE LENNON, DTM

To help launch the NCD revitalization effort, Lennon worked with Club President Alma San Antonio and Past Club Secretary Julie Matty. Since all three women have been active members and leaders in other clubs, they had excellent contacts in the District. Their strategy was strength in numbers, so other clubs were mobilized to restore viability to NCD. Members of BPNG Toastmasters, sponsored by the Bank of Papua New Guinea, and BSP Toastmasters Club, sponsored by the Bank of the South Pacific, joined NCD meetings online to fill out speaking and

meeting roles. Several pre-charter groups attended to learn about running a successful club. Members of Capital Toastmasters Suva in Fiji (then-undistricted) also came to share their skills, along with the District’s newest club, KPMG PNG, a corporate club in Port Moresby.

Lennon also invited past club members and corporations who hadn’t had enough employee interest to start clubs of their own. The result: A robust group of diverse, multi-talented individuals began attending NCD online meetings regularly.

“Having a base of committed members who turned up every week” made an enormous difference, Lennon says. Existing members learned from their colleagues and helped welcome guests, who received a solid, well-rounded introduction to the organization.

NCD received a big uptick in membership when the OK Tedi Mining Company agreed to pay membership fees for eight employees. Lennon wasted no time in visiting the mine site and the company office in Port Moresby.

“I spent a day with the women in the office and 14 signed up as members!” Lennon says. Soon, leaders at the company realized that Toastmasters would be a tremendous benefit in training their leadership team and pledged additional support.

NCD also developed a mentoring program, drawing from its base of experienced members. That led to an influx of new members, including a member with the experience to facilitate hybrid meetings. Today, NCD has 25 members, with many more visiting online.

A heartfelt, innovative collaboration helped drive NPD’s vibrant new culture. “It’s exciting to have a full agenda and to sometimes see 36 people online as visitors,” Lennon says. “As they step out of their comfort zones, new members are even more excited [about the club].”

She adds: “I believe that every one of us has grown in the process and continues to grow, gaining skills posed by the challenges. Our continuing success is due to the teamwork that really made our dream work.”

Emphasizing the Fun

Paddington Toastmasters • London, England

Paddington Toastmasters has had its ups and downs over the years, but the club is definitely on the upside of success now. Founded in 2015, it grew quickly due to an excellent meeting location near the Paddington underground station in London. However, within a short time span, the club had to move three times, and with each move, fewer members renewed. Eventually they found an ideal location near another underground station and things were looking up. Then COVID-19 hit.

Many members weren't interested in online meetings, and membership dropped to just eight people. "They were eight very loyal members," emphasizes Janet Milnes, a Toastmaster for 30 years, current Vice President Education, and originally an advisor to the club. "So we kept going, we kept having fun, and decided to see where we were when we came out of this."

They still had their venue, and in September 2021, the club decided to go hybrid. Membership bounced back up to 17. However, it then dropped to single digits again, mainly due to a rise in members needing to move for professional reasons.

Knowing people had always remarked on how fun and convivial the club was, club leaders decided their marketing and outreach efforts needed to reflect more of that personality. They completely revamped

their [website](#), going through several versions before landing on one that reflected the friendly, upbeat culture of their club.

"It immediately had an effect," says Milnes. Soon more than half of the guests were finding the club through the website (with the rest being from [Find A Club](#) on the Toastmasters website).

When guests reach out, Milnes now sends a personalized letter that includes meeting details and what to expect, and she answers any questions or concerns the guest has expressed. As a result, she often has an email exchange with guests long before they come to a meeting. She sends agendas to guests for two months after their last visit. Even if they never end up visiting, she keeps them on a general mailing list for another two months. "I've had guests contact me even after a year," notes Milnes.

Club leaders decided their marketing and outreach efforts needed to reflect more of the club's fun and convivial personality.

To keep members engaged, the club occasionally hosts an educational session or Speakathon, or two people may present in a question-and-answer format. They'll also do communication games and member

Paddington Toastmasters, London, England





TGIS Toastmasters, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

challenges. Table Topics® might focus on something other than a question—such as pictures or a word. “We’re trying to get everyone to extend their thinking and explore different ways of doing things,” says Milnes. “We want to spark associations and encourage people to think outside the box.”

The club attracts members from a wide variety of ages, cultures, and levels of experience, and above all, the club wants to find members who are the right fit with the club culture. Guests are asked to come at least two or three times before they apply. “Having guests join immediately doesn’t always work,” notes Milnes. “We also want to make sure we’re the right club for them. We encourage them to visit other clubs before they may decide to join ours.”

And all the efforts are working. “We’re now in a really fortunate situation where we’re thinking, how big do we actually want to be? There’s a time when it’s too big.”

Leaning Into Experience

TGIS Toastmasters Club • Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Membership soared during the pandemic for TGIS Toastmasters, an energetic community club in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, that chartered in 2005. Ironically, the challenge began after the crisis, when COVID-19 cases had slowed down in the country.

TGIS (Think, Grow, Inspire, Succeed) remained vibrant through much of the pandemic, as the online format allowed members from all over the world to visit and join the club, according to Santosh Zope, Vice President Education.

“We hosted two meetings a month that were internationally accessible,” explains Zope. The visibility, coupled with a potent social media strategy highlighting the club and its benefits, resulted in new members from other countries.

As the pandemic waned in Dubai, TGIS became one of the first clubs in the UAE to offer hybrid meetings. However, the transition to yet another meeting format wasn’t seamless. Membership slumped. Tech glitches and other issues—such as members missing the authenticity of speaking before an in-person audience—left many attendees dissatisfied with meeting quality, Zope says. A club survey showed an overwhelming preference for in-person meetings, so the club returned to that format.

Fortunately, the club’s Executive Committee has a long history of strategically assessing change management every year—a practice they

followed before, during, and after the pandemic. They plan for and expect the best circumstances, but also prepare for surprises.

Each year, the Executive Committee introduces new practices to ensure the club recruits new members and continues to engage its existing members, Zope says.

Each year, the Executive Committee introduces new practices to ensure the club recruits new members and continues to engage its existing members.

For example, the club created a “Why TGIS?” campaign, with members sharing short video clips on the benefits of joining and being active in the club. The club also uses video clips to welcome and highlight new members, who share their backgrounds and why they joined TGIS. These appealing tactics “show the club is super active and offers loads to learn from,” says Club President Mohini Mehta. “They definitely leave a positive image on the mind of anyone planning to join the club.”

The club is also diligent in phoning members who haven’t attended for a few meetings so “we can understand the reason,” Mehta adds. Often just a reminder how caring the club is brings members back “for the amazing friendships they’ve made.” While not a highly unusual recruitment tactic, TGIS has found that utilizing experienced members to impress guests is highly successful. “We mix up fresh speakers/evaluators with seasoned speakers/evaluators,” Zope says. “This helps us to inspire and convert them to members.

“Experienced members play a great role in member recruitment, such as talking to guests during breaks of the meeting and advising them of Toastmasters benefits,” he adds. The personal touch is persuasive for everyone involved. “We create bonding between members and potential members. That gives a completely new dimension and purpose to members and, in turn, to our club.”

The club hosts vibrant, photo-filled Facebook and Instagram pages, and has found strong advocates among Google reviewers who joined the club. Notes one reviewer: “TGIS has had a tremendous impact on my professional and personal life. I’m immensely proud to be a member.”

Laura Amann is managing editor and Stephanie Darling is senior editor for the Toastmaster magazine.

Introducing the Yoodli Partnership

New artificial intelligence program augments the club experience.

By Laura Mishkind

The world of technology seems to change by the minute, and Toastmasters International is jumping into the artificial intelligence (AI) realm with a new partner—Yoodli. This AI-powered speech coach is on a mission to help people communicate with confidence, just like Toastmasters. Yoodli serves as another powerful feedback tool, especially helpful to use alongside your club evaluations, and to help you prepare for your next Toastmasters speech or practice for an upcoming speech contest.

Founder Varun Puri explains, “Members can use Yoodli to prepare for upcoming speeches (such as Pathways or contests), upload any speech recording from the past, or practice interview questions and Table Topics, all from the comfort of their homes. Yoodli helps them be more aware of their speaking habits and track progress over time.”

Yoodli evaluates ums and ahs, repeated words, non-inclusive words and language, top keywords, and any “weak” words like “totally” and “really,” and more. The AI program will also track your pacing and eye contact and provide recommendations on whether you could have included more pauses. It even tells you if you’re centered well on camera, which can benefit members during online meetings and presentations.

Diane Windingland, DTM, a member of PowerTalk Toastmasters and Readership Toastmasters in Minnesota, and a speaking coach, began using Yoodli in August 2022 for her coaching business and her own Toastmasters practice. Windingland feels the AI platform helped her advance in the Tall Tales Speech Contest. After winning the contest at the Area level, she uploaded the speech recording to Yoodli, which showed that her pace was rather slow—something she hadn’t noticed.

“I thought that the speech would sound more natural, and the story might be more exciting, if I increased my pace a bit, so I practiced it faster,” she explains. “Yoodli allowed me not only to see and hear a faster version but also to measure my progress as I increased the pace. I think it worked! I won the Division contest and will be a contestant in the District contest this spring.”

Puri says this is a prime example of how Yoodli can augment the Toastmasters experience. In fact, some of Yoodli’s most active users include Toastmasters who have advanced to the World Championship of Public Speaking®.

Roger Caesar, DTM, of Brampton Toastmasters and Raising Champions Advanced Toastmasters, both in Brampton, Ontario, Canada, earned the third-place spot

in the 2021 World Championship of Public Speaking. He began using Yoodli in September 2022 and quickly incorporated the technology into his speech coaching work. Caesar says the most valuable thing he’s found from Yoodli is how quickly his clients have developed their skills, particularly in eliminating filler words and repetition.

“As a speaker and coach, I have noticed an improvement with my clients applying the information received from the Yoodli statistics,” Caesar explains. “Yoodli provides instant feedback on some basic fundamentals to public speaking in a way that is very user-friendly. ... It is a valuable resource for speakers of all levels.”

Puri’s goal with the Toastmasters Yoodli partnership is to help people around the world communicate with confidence. “Too many people miss out on opportunities they deserve because they don’t speak with confidence. I saw this firsthand growing up in India and then when I worked at Google. The loudest voices would get all the credit,” he says.

Inspired by platforms like Grammarly and Duolingo, which are helping people improve writing and language skills, respectively, Puri says, “I hope Yoodli can make the same kind of impact, but for speaking! And no better place to start than Toastmasters.”

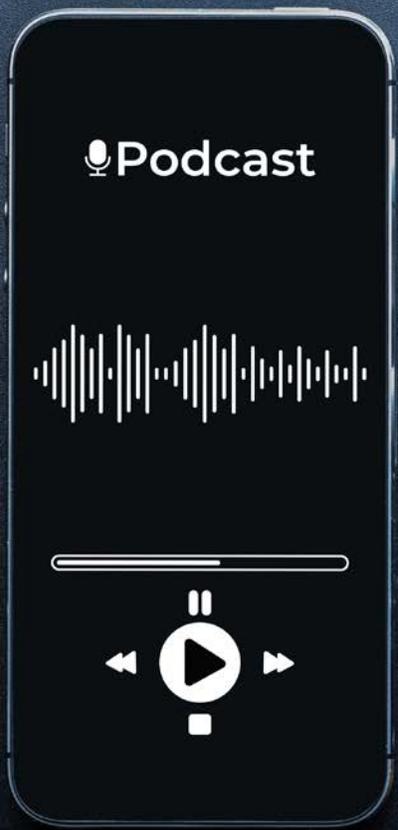
And the world is taking notice. Puri and his co-founder, Esha Joshi, were named to the 2022 Forbes 30 Under 30 list. He says, “It’s an honor to be featured with so many people I look up to! It’s especially validating to be featured with my co-founder, Esha, on a project we’re so passionate about.”

Ready to get started? Visit the Toastmasters website and log in. You will find a link to the Yoodli platform on your My Home page, under the “From the Organization to You” section. Follow the link to create a Yoodli account and start enjoying the benefits of this exclusive partnership! You can upload a recording of your speech for automatic, private feedback or practice for Table Topics® with games.

Windingland says, “While Yoodli cannot replace the camaraderie, the leadership development, the educational program, or the evaluations in a club meeting, it can provide additional feedback and practice opportunities.”

Editor’s Note: The Yoodli team wants to hear your feedback! Email them at info@yoodli.ai with comments, questions, and concerns.

Laura Mishkind is assistant editor for the Toastmaster magazine.



Tune In to The Toastmasters Podcast

Learn about the organization's official podcast series and its hosts.

By Shannon Dewey

Twice each month you can hear two Toastmasters engaged in conversation with inspiring guests from around the globe. Sometimes it's with the International President of Toastmasters or the new World Champion; other times it's with a doctor, comedian, or beauty queen. The [podcast episodes](#) are often filled with laughter and authentic dialogue.

Behind the scenes, the two 21-year members from different countries work hard to make it look seamless. Distinguished Toastmasters Greg Gazin and Ryan Levesque are the co-hosts who bring *The Toastmasters Podcast* to life. Read on to learn more about how this series began, what goes into the making of it, and some of their favorite episodes over the years.

How did the podcast get started?

Ryan: In 2007, my friend and business partner Bo Bennett began an *unofficial* podcast for Toastmasters. In 2009, after a track record of about

“Podcasting has helped me become a better communicator, both in speaking and listening, and it’s also helped me build more confidence, allowing me to talk to anyone, anywhere.”

—GREG GAZIN, DTM

50 episodes, Toastmasters International contacted us to host an official podcast for the organization, and *The Toastmasters Podcast* was born.

Our first episode came out in August 2009, prior to the International Convention in Mashantucket, Connecticut, and then our next three episodes were recorded onsite from the convention. Fun fact: we met fellow podcaster Greg at that convention, and he was a guest on episode two! After guest-hosting a couple of episodes, he joined us as a third host in 2014. In 2019, Bo decided to step back, maintaining the ToastmastersPodcast.com website, while Greg and I handled the interviews and production.

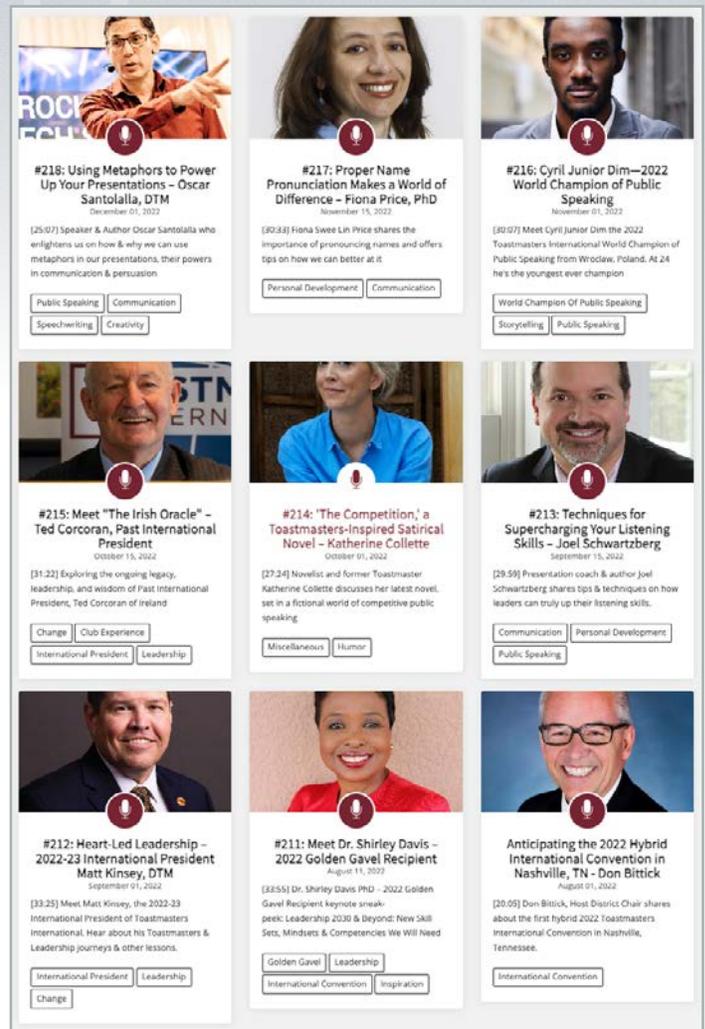
Help us get to know you a little better.

Greg: I live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and have been a Toastmaster for exactly 21 years. I am a six-time DTM, Past District Governor (Director), and a proud member of New Entrepreneurs Toastmasters Club.

Professionally, I’m a syndicated technology and lifestyle columnist for Troy Media, speaker, facilitator, podcaster, and author of *Corey OutSMARTs The Butterflies*. I’ve been podcasting since 2006, when I created *ToastCaster* as a District podcast for my High Performance Leadership project. That was rebranded as *ToastCaster Communication Leadership and Learning Lab*, and I still publish it as a monthly podcast 16 years later.

Ryan: I’m a lifelong resident of Massachusetts, and like Greg, I’m celebrating 21 years in Toastmasters this year. I joined the organization one month prior to Greg. However, if you consider his six DTMs compared to my one, you could say he has run circles around me.

After a decade of running a publishing company with Bo, I am now leveraging my love for the written word as a writer for blockchain, cryptocurrency, and metaverse-related companies and projects. On the personal front, I’m married to my high school sweetheart, and we homeschool our 13-year-old daughter whom we adopted at 6 months from Medellin, Colombia.



Where do you find interview sources and what’s the process like?

Greg: The majority of ideas, topics, and guests come from the Toastmaster magazine. Guests may be someone who authored an article, was interviewed or mentioned in a story, or perhaps is a subject-matter expert in the subject covered by an article.

After reaching out to schedule the interview, we gather background information, do preliminary research, and then come up with an angle. Ryan and I use a shared Google Doc to brainstorm sample questions, and we meet prior to the interview to review and organize our approach. Of course, there’s often some adjusting on the fly, depending on how the conversation shapes up. Often the guest will bring up something that we want to probe more deeply.

How long does it take to record/interview someone?

Greg: We look for about 20 to 30 minutes of finished audio, so we usually ask for about 45 minutes to one hour of our guest’s time. This gives us extra



Ryan Levesque

Greg Gazin

time to take care of set-up and housekeeping and chat with the guest ahead of time in case they have any questions for us, or we have any questions for them. It also gives us an opportunity to break the ice if they are a little nervous or doing this for the first time. In addition, an hour before the interview, Ryan and I connect to do a hardware and sound check, review our game plan for the interview, and make any additional changes.

What’s the timeframe for editing to produce the final version we hear?

Greg: We typically look at three to four hours, but it could take as much as 10. It depends on the length of the interview, the continuity of the conversation, and whether there were any technical or sound issues requiring special attention in post-production. In cases where the interview went over time, we trim it down or edit for clarification. We also write a narrative for the show’s description to be used on the podcast site.

How would you describe the genre of this podcast? What kind of topics do you cover?

Ryan: In terms of genre, *The Toastmasters Podcast* is an interview show. The topics we cover, like the *Toastmaster* magazine, focus heavily on personal

“We’ve interviewed Accredited Speakers, Golden Gavel recipients, a blind equestrian rider, a dog whisperer, a failed American Idol contestant, a real-life action hero, and so many others.”

—GREG GAZIN, DTM

and professional development, frequently touching on aspects of communication and leadership, seeing them through a variety of lenses.

What’s your favorite part about being a podcast host?

Greg: I’m really energized meeting new people and getting to know them. I really thrive on the challenge of finding the right questions to help our guests best share their incredible stories and lessons and help make them shine so both the guests and the audience gain the maximum benefit. Co-hosting with Ryan really adds to the experience.

“The topics we cover focus heavily on personal and professional development, frequently touching on aspects of communication and leadership, seeing them through a variety of lenses.”

—RYAN LEVESQUE, DTM

Ryan: I have to agree with Greg—co-hosting with me really is the highlight for him! On a serious note, what moves me is the opportunity to meet and speak with amazing people. We hear inspiring stories and powerful ideas, and then let our curiosity lead us to exploring further and deeper. With nearly every episode, we walk away with a golden nugget or two, and sometimes downright transformational insights. It’s also fun co-hosting with Greg and learning from him. He listens closely and will often ask brilliant follow-up questions that I never would have thought of.

You’ve now published more than 220 episodes. Can you recall your most memorable guests or topics?

Greg: There are so many to choose from and each one is special. We’ve interviewed Accredited Speakers, Golden Gavel recipients, a blind equestrian rider, a dog whisperer, a failed American Idol contestant, a real-life action hero, and so many others. I’d have to say the one guest whose appearance is permanently ingrained in my brain is [Sara Safari, DTM](#). Sara shared an incredible journey of tremendous personal growth gained through Toastmasters, and through undertaking a death-defying “impossible goal” of climbing Mount Everest. What made this indelibly etched in my memory is her gut-wrenching account of dangling off the world’s highest mountain clinging for dear life when the Nepali earthquake struck. Her story will inspire anyone to face their fears, go beyond their comfort zone, and challenge anyone to reconsider their limits of what is possible.

Are there any embarrassing moments or technology fails that you care to share?

Greg: Technology will typically fail at the least opportune time. On one occasion while interviewing comedian [Judy Carter](#), my microphone went to sleep as Ryan and Judy were having a dialogue. After getting a new computer and a new dock, it turns out that a USB mic plugged into a dock will power off after a certain time when it senses no signal. Long story short, no audio was recorded. Judy being Judy wasted no time in heckling me about it being time to get rid of my “Radio Shack special microphone.” We had a good laugh and left that in the final cut for everyone to enjoy.

What advice do you have for people who are interested in starting a podcast?

Greg: The first thing to consider is your why. Why do you want to start a podcast? This is one of many topics Ryan and I cover in two episodes entitled, “Creating Interesting Podcast Content”: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#). You may also consider reading the article from the January 2021 *Toastmaster* magazine, “[Is There a Podcast in Your Future?](#)”

I also suggest listening to a wide variety of podcasts and then try to record something. These days, most people have a smartphone with a built-in microphone. You can record an idea, a project speech, or an opinion. Maybe you can talk about your favorite movie, hobby, or sport. Anything to get you started. Begin by working through the Podcasting Level 4 Elective in Pathways. You don’t have to publish it, but at least you’ve got started.

Is there anything else you’d like to add about the podcast or your experiences?

Greg: I really love that through the podcast you can meet some incredible people and learn new things while being thoroughly entertained. With the magazine tie-in, hearing the guest’s voice helps amplify the words on the page and literally brings them to life.

Podcasting has helped me become a better communicator, both in speaking and listening, and it’s also helped me build more confidence, allowing me to talk to anyone, anywhere. It has also helped me become a better leader. While Toastmasters has helped me build and better those skills, the podcast has allowed me to regularly put them into practice in real-life situations.

And finally, the podcast has really helped me solidify a great friendship with my co-host Ryan. Although we live in different countries and are thousands of miles apart, we have become a great team. We keep each other in check and help each other grow by mentoring, challenging, and supporting each other both inside and outside of Toastmasters.

Ryan: I wholeheartedly agree and couldn’t have said it better myself!

Editor’s Note: Do you know an inspiring member who would make a great podcast guest? Send your recommendation to podcast@toastmasters.org.

Shannon Dewey is digital strategy and engagement editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.

How to Listen

Two episodes are released every month, on the 1st and the 15th. You can find all 200-plus episodes at ToastmastersPodcast.com, under the Resource tab at Toastmasters.org, and often alongside a magazine article that is referenced. The most recent 25 episodes are available on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Google Podcasts](#), and other players. In addition, you can now listen to relevant episodes in Base Camp that align with some Pathways projects!

5 Ways to Reinvigorate Yourself After Retirement

Continue building on your life experiences with Toastmasters.

By Greg Lewis, DTM

You often hear about the benefits of Toastmasters for those who are just starting their careers. While this can be true, what about seniors who have been retired for some time? Would they gain anything from Toastmasters? The short answer is: Absolutely!

Age has nothing to do with the world of benefits Toastmasters offers. In fact, some of these advantages are actually *more* helpful to seniors. Here are five ways Toastmasters can bring value to seniors and retirees.

1 You will stay busy and keep your mind sharp.

A challenge for some retirees is staying busy after they stop working. And seniors often are looking for ways to keep their minds sharp. The Alzheimer's Association states, "Mentally challenging activities, such as learning a new skill, adopting a new hobby, or engaging in formal education may have short- and long-term benefits for your brain. To keep your mind active, it is important to participate in activities that expose your mind to new topics."

Membership in Toastmasters can provide a solution to these challenges. Club members have the opportunity to stay as busy as they want. From attending meetings regularly to taking on leadership roles to working on a Pathways project, there is always plenty to do.

Jean Small, DTM, Ph.D., was looking to build on the communication skills she had developed during a long teaching career. When she retired, she joined Dynamic Speakers Club in Jamaica at the age of 68. Not only did Small win Table Topics® at her first meeting, but she quickly realized Toastmasters was the perfect group to help her accomplish her communication goals and keep her mind active. Small went on to win numerous speech contests, including the Caribbean International Speech contest at 72 years old. But she did not stop there.

At 86, she joined a French-speaking club in Haiti to improve her speaking skills in that language. She is currently working on her fifth Pathways path in French, and her sixth in English, in addition to being a member of three clubs. In 2022, she was a Triple Crown winner, which is awarded to members who achieve three education awards in a single program year. Reflecting on her Toastmasters journey, Small enthusiastically recommended joining a club to any senior looking to stay busy and mentally sharp.

"I was already older than all the members there (when I joined Toastmasters), but I did not feel old. I would tell any senior thinking of joining Toastmasters that they would bring their life experiences through the speeches they make and so share wisdom with a younger generation and have the joy of personal success and fulfillment in doing so," says Small.

Preparing for and actively participating in meetings and other Toastmasters events engages your brain. Some seniors face varying degrees of cognitive challenges and therefore may be hesitant to join a club. However, one of the main core values of Toastmasters is respect for the individual, and existing members show empathy for everyone starting their Toastmasters journey to provide a safe haven for all.

2 You will come across volunteer opportunities.

Many retirees want to "give back" by volunteering; Toastmasters offers many such opportunities. Members can volunteer to assist with special club events, such as open houses and speech contests. They can also take the Toastmasters experience into their communities by establishing Gavel Clubs, running a Youth Leadership Program, or even helping host a Speechcraft course.

There are also tremendous opportunities to mentor newer members. Charles Kennedy, DTM, is a recent



Cara Wasden



Charles Kennedy, DTM



Jean Small, DTM



Julie Kertesz, DTM

retiree and member of Niagara On The Lake Toastmasters in Ontario, Canada. As one of the club's most experienced members, Kennedy currently mentors five others. Recognizing the challenges of mentoring so many, he set up a weekly Zoom meeting for all his mentees.

or leading teams, and becoming a Club President (or taking on any club officer role) can fill that need.

There is perhaps no better example of a senior Toastmaster finding that new purpose than Julie Kertesz, DTM. Kertesz is a French

multiple generations, thus giving you exposure to a broader range of experiences. The opportunity to make new friends outside your [age group](#) can be very rewarding.

As Wasden notes, "One of the greatest benefits for seniors participating in Toastmasters is the sense of connection and of being seen and heard."

"One of the greatest benefits for seniors participating in Toastmasters is the sense of connection and of being seen and heard."

-CARA WASDEN

"The group session is a great forum where mentees can learn from each other and share their experiences," Kennedy says. "It is also a very rewarding experience for me, because I get to see firsthand the power of a nudge accompanied by a kind word of encouragement."

Cara Wasden, a member of Toast of Petaluma club in Petaluma, California, [volunteers](#) her time by conducting weekly Table Topics sessions at a local senior community. While not a senior herself, Wasden loves bringing the benefits of Table Topics to the group, and recommends starting one at your local senior living community.

3 You can find a new sense of purpose.

Retirees often feel lost when they realize their identity was based largely on their career. Joining a Toastmasters club can provide a new purpose. Setting a goal of completing a Pathways level or project or joining the club's executive committee, for example, can bring a new sense of purpose. Some retirees find that they miss the challenge they had when working

citizen living in London, England. At 73 she rediscovered Toastmasters. She is currently a Club President and member of three clubs, has held most club officer positions, is a past U.K. Pathways ambassador, has achieved two DTMs, writes a blog, and holds a weekly storytelling session on Zoom for school kids in India. Kertesz is now 88 and still going strong. Talk about a newfound sense of purpose!

4 You will make new friends.

In retirement, you often lose a large part of your social network and the regular interactions you enjoyed in your career. Toastmasters helps fill this void. Joining a club provides instant access to new friends. You discover the opportunity to meet and engage on a regular basis—either in person or online—with a group of people who share a common interest.

There are also health benefits to joining a Toastmasters club. The Alzheimer's Society advises that "remaining socially active may support brain health and possibly delay the onset of dementia." As an added bonus, most Toastmasters clubs have members representing

5 You can network and stay ahead of the curve.

There are many people who decide to semi-retire or become entrepreneurs after finishing their initial career. Toastmasters offers opportunities to expand your network at the club, Area, and District levels. Additionally, you can virtually visit clubs around the world and gain connections from different countries.

As a Toastmaster, you will also keep up with current communication trends, such as meeting and presenting in an online format, gaining cross-cultural etiquette, and learning how to start a podcast or blog. All of these are vital to entrepreneurs and seniors who are still working in some capacity.

If you are a senior and already a member, consider new ways that Toastmasters could enrich your life. If you know a senior who hasn't yet experienced Toastmasters, share this article and encourage them to visit a club as your guest. Offer to bring them with you—we all know that first visit can be a little intimidating.

As you have seen, when you combine Toastmasters and seniors, the possibilities are endless!

Greg Lewis, DTM, is a frequent contributor to the Toastmaster and a retired business professional who strives to inspire and encourage his fellow Toastmasters.

The Wide World of Hybrid Toastmasters

How to choose how much technology your club needs.

By David F. Carr, DTM

Conducting hybrid meetings can be challenging, particularly with all the technology options available. However, hybrid meetings are worth pursuing, as they are a great way not only to connect with members and guests outside your geographic area but also to learn professional skills that are increasingly valuable in the workplace.

Despite the potential benefits, going hybrid is not the right choice for every club, so you'll want to evaluate your options (and have your club vote on the decision).

My home club, Club Awesome in Coral Springs, Florida, began holding hybrid meetings shortly before the pandemic. Perfect timing, because we were ready when so many clubs started transitioning to online meetings. Since then, I've been helping club members and leaders adapt.

Getting People to Show Up—In Person and Online

Of course, none of the technical details matter unless club leaders and club members are committed to making the hybrid format work.

"If there are only three or four people in the room, then you have to ask, 'how many people will come next time? If only that many, should we just meet online?'" says Cajetan Barretto, DTM, Vice President Education, Kuwait Challengers Club in Kuwait City, Kuwait.

Barretto has been active in training on online and hybrid meeting technologies in District 20 and worldwide through his YouTube channel [Tech for Toastmasters](#). He has also run District and professional hybrid events. However, the challenge is different at the club level, where smaller numbers make achieving the right balance harder.

Agnieszka "Aggie" Ilnicka, President of Framingham/Natick Toastmasters in Framingham, Massachusetts, says when her club first considered what to do, most members said they had been attending too many Zoom meetings during the workday and were eager to attend evening meetings in person.

However, not all members live in driving distance, so the club went hybrid, something fellow club member and

Vice President Membership Tracy Eisenman, who lives three states away in Pennsylvania, appreciated. She joined the club when it was fully online. "I felt like they went hybrid to keep me in the club, which was kind of cool," she says.

Your club will have to find its own balance.

Weighing the Options

The technical elements of the hybrid format are speaker and microphone (audio), camera or cameras along with a TV or projector (video), and, of course, internet access. In general, I recommend going beyond what's built into a laptop.

Audio

Contrary to what you might think, the audio rather than the visual component of the video stream is what's most important for effective communication. Common problems include the echo and distortion that occur if multiple people in a meeting room join the online session with their audio turned on. Only one computer should have audio input and output active.

The main audio feed should be clear enough that online participants can hear those in the room and vice versa.

If you're using Zoom, the "Leave Audio" option (found on the up arrow menu next to the microphone icon) lets you quickly mute both mic and speaker. Or you can change your settings to have Zoom always prompt you whether to activate computer audio.

Both Barretto, of Kuwait, and hybrid meetings expert Markus Seppälä, DTM, of Basel International Speakers in Basel, Switzerland, recommend using a conference room speakerphone placed near the speaking area. (Seppälä has compiled a list of [equipment recommendations](#).) My club has a speakerphone but also invested in a wireless microphone. We often leave it on the lectern, but it can be clipped to the speaker's clothing.

Video

A camera mounted on a tripod will allow you to aim the camera more effectively. Three options to consider are:



Tyler Storer presents during a hybrid meeting of Club Awesome Toastmasters.

of a couple of smartphones (volunteered by members in attendance) acting as additional cameras. Ilnicka, of Framingham/Natick Toastmasters, notes that they started out using a more complicated setup, then made a conscious decision to simplify.

One of their members donated a laptop, making the club's only purchase a \$220 USD projector. External speakers turned out to be unnecessary because the projector had a built-in speaker. The only other gear the club might consider purchasing is an external webcam, she says.

My club, Club Awesome, has spent upward of \$1,000 USD, because we had the money and club leaders believed we should spend what was required to make hybrid meetings successful. We decided the club should own the essential equipment, rather than being dependent on equipment provided by a member—where if that person doesn't show up, the meeting can't go on. Standardizing equipment as much as possible also

- An external webcam with a tripod mount, which is what my club uses.
- A digital SLR camera that can be connected to a computer with a USB cable. This is what Cam Krook, DTM, who serves in District 69's club promotion coaching and technical support position, recommends.
- A smartphone clamped into a tripod mount. Barretto uses this option with the camera in selfie mode, allowing speakers to see themselves on screen.

If practical, adding one or more additional cameras aimed at the audience can help online participants see what is happening in the room. This can be a smartphone or a tablet.

Finally, in order for in-room participants to see online speakers, you will also need a TV or projector. Again, these can be as basic or fancy as your budget allows.

Internet access

Ideally, your meeting location will provide free, fast, and reliable Wi-Fi. If that is not available, or it fails on a given meeting day, it's possible to run a Zoom meeting off the Wi-Fi hotspot built into a member's smartphone. Or consider purchasing a dedicated 5G wireless hotspot device.

Finding the Tech Balance

A good hybrid meeting should be good for everyone, whether attendees are in person or online. A bad hybrid experience tends to be particularly bad for the online participants, who feel left out when they can't see or hear what's happening in the room

Every club has different needs: A club that meets in a corporate meeting room or university lecture room with technology for conducting hybrid classes will have different needs than a club that meets in a church basement with no equipment. A club with reserves of money will have

The challenge of going hybrid is different at the club level, where smaller numbers make achieving the right balance harder.

more options than one that must either collect money for equipment or depend on members to provide equipment. A club full of IT and audiovisual professionals won't have the same hurdles as one made up of technically challenged folks.

Krook, District 69's technical support specialist, is also a business systems analyst, as well as a consultant and trainer in the Agile project management methodology. But he says everything he has learned about audio-visual tech comes from learning by doing in Toastmasters. Before deciding what your club needs, he recommends doing a "needs assessment," where you assess where you are starting from in terms of requirements, meeting venue, existing technology, and the technical skills of your members.

"Preparation is key, as it is in so many situations," Krook says.

Should you keep it simple, using only the camera and microphone built into a laptop? That's essentially what Framingham/Natick Toastmasters has been doing. The club does take advantage

helped us get multiple people trained to set up the room and the tech.

Your budget is dependent on your club's needs and situation—you'll need more funds if you're starting from zero, but you may be able to spend less if you get donations, or your meeting venue provides the essentials.

Providing a good experience for both online and offline participants is easier said than done. The technical part is important, but less so than the member experience created by club leaders. Members who feel their presence is valued will be more patient with the technical misadventures that occur along the way and more committed to making hybrid work for the club.

David F. Carr, DTM, is a writer, editor, and digital consultant based in Coral Springs, Florida. He is a member of Online Presenters and Club Awesome, both in Coral Springs. He is also the founder of the *WordPress for Toastmasters* project and runs the [Toastmost.org](https://www.toastmost.org) club website hosting service.

Just Say It

Give it to 'em straight. Don't prevaricate. Let me demonstrate.

By John Cadley

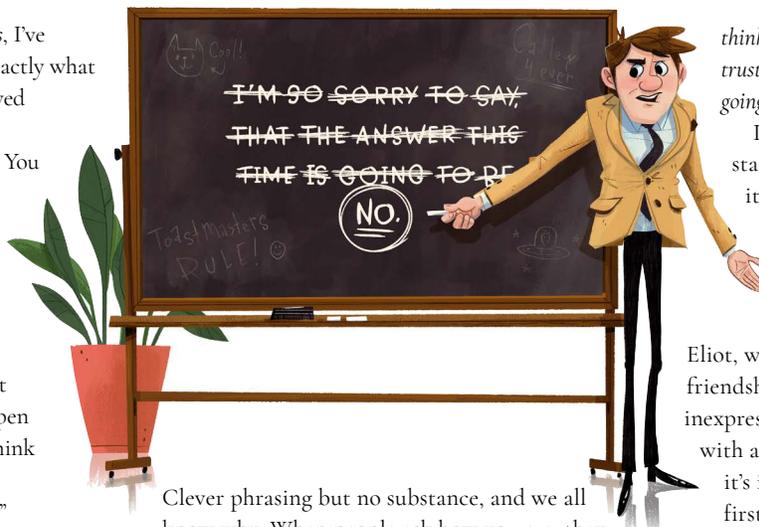
In my years observing *homo sapiens*, I've noticed that humans rarely say exactly what they mean. Speaking with unalloyed confidence is viewed as socially unattractive. You can be confident. You can be very confident. But you can not be supremely confident without creating the impression of omniscience, a quality reserved for a higher order of being altogether. It puts you in the "He thinks he's God" category. You don't want to be there ... even if you happen to think it's true. *Especially* if you think it's true.

People don't want to go "all in," either. Saying something with lapidary precision leaves no possibility of a disclaimer should the words you have spoken turn out to be stupendously stupid.

Take "no," for example. Two letters, one syllable, and a nanosecond of work by the larynx to vocalize the sound. Yet we never hear a stark naked "no." It always comes in camouflage clothing: "Gee, I really hate to say no but ..." Or, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to say no." Or, "In a word, no" (that's four words but who's counting?). The only time we do hear no in its bare, monosyllabic simplicity is when our parents say it to us as children, signifying that we can't have something we want. This classifies our parents as mean people. Nobody wants to be a meany. So we try to be a nice meany.

Or let's say you don't like something. The shortest route to expressing that sentiment is "I don't like it." Instead, we choose the long way home: "Not exactly my cup of tea," for instance. Or, "Not too crazy about it." Really? Just how not crazy are you?

Then there are the myriad answers to "How are you?" You might say, "Oh, I guess I can't complain." ... "Not too bad." ... "Keepin' it between the lines." ... "Well, I'm still vertical."



Clever phrasing but no substance, and we all know why: When people ask how you are, they don't want to know.

We even play these word games when there's nothing to be gained. You tell your spouse, "I'm going to the store." Distracted, he or she asks, "What did you say?" You reply, "I said I'm going to the market in the village to get some milk." That's not what you said. You said five words the first time and 14 different words the second time. What's going on here? Why do we never repeat exactly what we said?—e.g., "I'm going to the store." "What did you say?" "I said I'm going to the store."

If all we ever say is
"Yes," "No," and "I love you,"
there will be a lot of
silence in between.

What's wrong with that? A lot, actually. "I said I'm going to the store." Hear that sentence in your mind. Listen to it carefully. Does it carry a certain ... tone? Does it say: *Why do I have to repeat myself? Why don't you ever listen to me? Why do I have to explain myself? What—do you*

think I'm not going to the store? You don't trust me now? Where do you think I'm going? Maybe my mother was right.

If a slight rephrasing of the statement can avoid all that, I'd say it's worth it.

It's particularly vexing to see this excess in people who should know better, such as the English author George Eliot, who opens her famous homage to friendship with, "Oh the comfort—the inexpressible comfort—of feeling safe with a person." First, it's comfort, then it's inexpressible comfort. Is this the first draft?

Or what about *The New York Times* editors who give us this headline: "There's a Reason There Aren't Enough Teachers in America. Many Reasons, Actually." Yes, and too many words to say it. Why not just "There Are Many Reasons ..."? If it's for dramatic effect, I would say the newspaper itself provides enough drama sufficient to the day.

Allow me to close with the three most important words in any language: "I love you." So easy to say, and yet ... so hard. Substitutes abound: "You're my everything." ... "The light of my life." ... "My sunshine." ... "You complete me." ... "You're my angel." ... "My heart is yours." And so on.

Just say it! We can't—or we won't. If all we ever say is "Yes," "No," and "I love you," there will be a lot of silence in between. Silence is awkward. It's a void, a vacuum, and nature—not to mention people—abhors a vacuum. Even space, a near vacuum, is filled with gas, dust, and winds of particles. Is that what we're doing—filling our social interactions with gas, dust, and wind? I'd rather not say.

John Cadley is a former advertising copywriter and currently a musician working in upstate New York. Learn more at www.cadleys.com.

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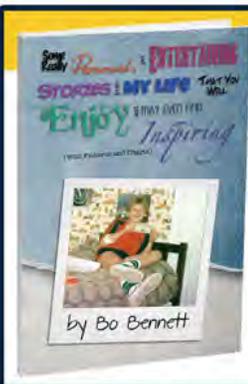
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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at 

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